



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

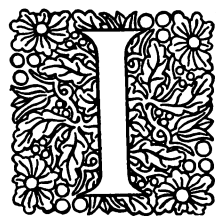
Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

BRADLEY: HIS BOOK

AT THE EDGE OF THE WOODS. GEORGE W. CABLE

November
N. D.
MDCCLXXVI.
Volume
Two,
Number
One.



IN a man of any real mind, two things there are for which only unfamiliarity ever breeds contempt; two things that are never rightly loved in vain, and only bondage to which can beget satiety: good books, green woods. They unfailingly reward your courtship. And they are never jealous. All actual businesses lay marital claims upon us. The nobler the vocation the more incessant and exacting its conjugal inquisition. But books and woods never tax us for fealty; they grow the more lovely the more, while we refresh ourselves upon them, we spend our strength and service otherwheres. They never resent or dictate our mood. Who can match the sweet civility of forest trees? Who joins in one such self-respect and modesty? Who shows such deference to the gentle? Who has such endearing persuasions, who such pleasant disclosures, as have woods, underwoods and shaded streams? Their swift soft changes of countenance, their kind assents to our worthy moods, their ennobling dissents from moods that are unworthy, their magic harmony of youth and years, who may rival them?

I ask as though there were no reply, and lo! I find myself describing one whose brow, though kissed by a son's bride, keeps yet the union of beauty and sanctity which too commonly belongs to bridal days alone. No tender charm has grove, sky or stream, that does not shine from Stella in sweeter, deeper measure. I see, in fancy, now, that soft illumination of her glance with which she answered when first I told her that like others, my good neighbors, including especially the gentle gray Doctor, her life's partner, I had ransomed from the axe that share of Paradise over against me.—Paradise is a piece of riverside woods on the western edge of the town where I live, so called the last half-century or more.

The friendship of trees is most good. Even when it is a sort of self-love, as it easily may be, it is as nearly noble as any form of that sentiment. But "most good" need not mean best. Find what we may in the entire floral realm, we can give it our

highest

At the Edge of the Woods

highest praise only by fanciful attributions to it of human lovelinesses made vibrant for the moment in us or in our memory of others nobler or gentler than ourselves. All inanimate nature is but a mirror; the glory of the sunset cloud is not in the cloud, but in thee. Trite fact; but the womb of all the arts and of all humanities. Greater far is it to have the sense of beauty—nay, to know any feeling beyond touch, taste and smell, than to contain countless wealth of beauty and be only its insensible repository. Not the measure of beauty, but of life, is the true degree. The whole landscape has no existence of its own which is not easily outranked by any creature that finds use or delight in it; any being conscious of itself and moved by emotion or purpose. And if beauty is not preeminence, how much less is the mere largeness of life's corporeal embodiment. Trees charm us with their beauty and awe us with the spread of their gigantic arms, until we scarcely care to give them less regard than we give to the tame beasts drowsing at the edge of the wood; but see with what new eagerness we suddenly forget them as we catch sight of some small thing stealing, thrilled with alarm or craft, to its shrewdly galleried burrow, self-outlawed by an excess of animus that cannot accept our custody or control. It was after such a glimpse, one Sunday afternoon, in a ravine of Paradise woods, that the Doctor, by that odd knack which quiet souls sometimes have of silently making others speak for them, somehow put it into me to say what I scarcely now know how to retract: that in view of all life's truest values, the moral values not excepted, it were better to be a hunted mink, smuggling its throttled prey to its young or in any other way keeping the laws of its being with purposeful self-devotion and at hourly risk of its life, than the pastured ox with all his utilities, docilities and picturesque bulk of incarnation, minus affections and with no deeper feeling than the complacencies of a full stomach and a comfortable skin. Fancy him ruminating: "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other beasts are or even as yon mink." Give the little furry contrabandist and his mate but one year of life and they will have outlived the ox and the oak. So quoth I to the Doctor. Whose smile was his only reply. He keeps chickens.

But I recall a better instance. A quarter-of-a-mile through the woods behind us up the Licking Water is a rough piece of

low,

At the Edge of the Woods

low, sandy ground, full, in their season, of coarse, many-tinted grasses and flowering weeds; here and there beset with wild strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, grapes; with now and then a thicket of alders, birches or sumachs, and here and there an overspreading maple, oak or elm; at all the best times of the year a haunt of sunset glories. One day our smallest child and I were going softly here, both of us remembering that Nature's loveliest words are her whispers and are rarely spoken to the boisterous, when we came upon a little hen-sandpiper. We knew her sex by her transports of panic and solicitude, and the small, fluttering, stumbling white-lies with which she so pitifully strove to lure us after herself. But we had discovered two or three of her minute downy chicks, and would not be fooled. I had no trouble to catch one of them—a step of mine being a full hundred of its own—nor even to hold it without hurting it. For that exquisite atom of her intense life—wee, round puff of living smoke from the fires of a mother's heart—showed no groveling fear, but as I caged within my hollowed hand the inch-high form, throbbing with a surcharge of alert yet mild intelligence that beamed from every part (but mainly from his eye) like perfume from a flower, he stood and stept about the narrow walls of his conscious captivity with the dignity of a fairy prince. I let my own offspring peep through the clumsy bars, each ten or twenty times as big as the captive's gray-silken thigh, and I know not which of the three of us most utterly forgot sky, field and stream as I looked at my child gazing, dumb with passionate delight, on that small new-found partner of ours in the sweet and bitter vicissitudes of being and becoming. I seemed to hold in the hollow of my palm a whole little cosmos on legs. Before I let it go I asked if I should do so. The child glanced up to me with three quick nods, then bent again upon the warm, cunning ball of fears and desires, so fragile that one angry breath might destroy it, a gaze of mingled ravishment and happy self-denial, and I heard in my own heart like a clock in the night, "God so loved the world."

The human world. Do I make the thought clear? That we do not, or should not, found our love of the woods on a deeper interest in them than in the human life which throbs around us, and that the woods themselves teach us this. For

which

At the Edge of the Woods

which I love them all the more. I am enamoured of the woods; especially of this particular bit of them which goes tumbling down behind "Tarryawhile," my house. It is my galleried burrow, as full of sweetness as a bumble-bee's. Nay, as much fuller as it is deeper and more labyrinthine. "Tarryawhile" is but the hillock at the mouth of the den, where I sometimes sit and bark. Hence the name.

Tarryawhile! What a gay show it makes of that flagrantest and best paid of all the secondary virtues, hospitality. And not in vain; once in a while we catch a guest. To whom we hope the name says also, "Friend, one moment: ere you pass on into these lovely shades honor this porter's-lodge with your avowal that you have not lost preeminent interest in the creatures that build houses and live in them. Say that men, women, children, hopes, loves, hates, homes, wills, fates, are only too fearfully worth while, and the woods so gently, deeply, meekly so, that you seek the cool of the trees for respite, not from human interest, but only, and only for a moment, from the wide conflict of human 'interests'."

In houses and streets we meet as many wills as there are inhabitants, and must give more or less consideration to each, or else neglect our small but essential part in that great triune conquest, business of all the ages, the due subordination of nature, self and society to the increase—a net increase—of human happiness. In the town, to every product of industry or art hangs an ownership not ours, a purpose not our own. Not so the woods. They have been out of all this strife ever since they ceased to be part of the unsubjugated wilderness. They carry no onus, or next to none, of private possession. They wear a pleased guise of No-Man's-Land. That is one reason why boys love them. No boy ever guessed the woods belonged to any one—unless it were his father, who is his. No boy ever heard of a private ownership in a piece of woods without some incredulity and much regret. In a wood—a wood which has been conquered but not enslaved or put to torture—only sufficiently gentled to give us its happiest use—we, too, are boys and girls; out, that is, of the great struggle, and need not take serious account of even our own will, but may subordinate it cheerily to the spot's innocent incapacities. The trees, the

William Morris

ground, the stream, are almost as full of other lives and wills as the town; yes, and of strifes; but almost none are of a sort to startle, reproach or aggrieve us. Nothing is trivial, extraneous or impertinent in the woods, since there we have no schemes of economy, discipline or beauty. We let the squirrels do both the bragging and the scolding; we seek the leafy ambush not to string more tightly, but rather to unbend for a brief space, our bow of offensive and defensive purposes; to bathe and bind our wounded powers; above all to let human fellowship drowse a spell, that it may rise refreshed for new activity.

And not from our will and schemes alone, do the woods give us sweet liberty, but also from our wants; from countless appliances and real or fancied necessities of the downtown competitive, uptown social, and, worst of all, the competitive-social, life; from the cumbersome armor and artillery with which we seek to defy the fluctuations of day and night, hot and cold, rain and drought, all those things of which roof, chimney and smoothed highway are signs; in a word, from all that vast artificial order, with its myriad complexities, so many of them, no doubt, superfluous, which yet makes living and loving practicable to seven thousand times as many of us as if we should try to live only in the woods.

WILLIAM MORRIS, ARTIST, POET, CRAFTSMAN.



IN the death of William Morris the world loses a man of many gifts, any one of which raises him above his kind.

As artist, poet, designer and craftsman, he has been of importance and has inspired others with something of his own powers.

As a poet he showed his particular bent early in life, writing mediaeval romances for a college magazine, another of whose contributors was Dante Gabriel Rossetti; and his name is associated in many minds with the luscious sweetness of his "Earthly Paradise," which was the flower and quintessence of his earlier verse. Later in life he discarded Italian legend for the sagas of the north, and though he again returned to Latin verse, giving the world a translation of the *Odyssey*, which many consider the very finest rendering of that great poem, he did not make a return in style to his earlier work.